



What's in store for salespeople with regards to technology

It's the year 2006, and at the end of another long day on the road, you've finally managed to get some down time in your hotel room. Being the good road warrior that you are, you flip the cover on your laptop and instantly begin browsing your e-mail. (And just as you did five years ago, you start bemoaning the fact that no one has yet been able to solve the problem of too much e-mail!) You're looking for the important stuff, and there it is – a few key messages that offer up the latest intelligence on the key clients that you'll be meeting tomorrow morning.

Having fulfilled your work obligations, you head off to the health club, taking your laptop with you. Placing it on the special insert built into the top of the bike, you begin cycling while you browse several important web news and research sites so that you can keep your professional knowledge up-to-date. As your heart beat starts to hit your cardio target, the bike begins quietly communicating with your laptop, feeding it statistics as to your performance. Your laptop senses that you aren't keeping up the same pace as with your previous workouts, and so it instructs the bike to kick things up a notch. You start to struggle and pant.....

Once you've finished your work out, it's off to the pool. But before you dive in, you realize its time to connect to the kids. You press a small icon on the laptop screen, and instantly, you've got an image of your home kitchen on the screen. Moving the image a bit, you spot the kids on the couch watching TV. "Hey kids," you yell. "Daddy's here!" They turn off the TV with a bit of grumbling – some things never change. "Hi dad!" And your interactive videoconference with them begins.

How many times have you read an article that tries to tell you what the future will be like? And how many times when you encounter such an article do your eyes glaze over – after all, don't all these "articles of the future" tend to sound somewhat the same after a while?

The fact is, they can be, for the simple reason that it can be quite difficult to figure out where technology might take us, let alone what technology might exist. Perhaps that is why physicist Neils Bohr stated, "prediction is difficult, especially when it involves the future." But there are methods – I've long realized that if you want to figure out the future, you should take a look at what is happening around you today. Why? Because the future is right there, in front of you – it's just most people don't look for it.

The Internet certainly validates this lesson. I was online way back in 1982, quickly spotted the signs that foretold the emergence of a global e-mail address that people would use. There were plenty of others like me – and yet, the vast majority of the population was generally unaware that something of great significance was bubbling below the surface, soon to explode into public consciousness.

And that's the way it is with technology – there's always a lot of bubbling going on. Videoconferencing is soon set to boil. Now, the idea of a video-based phone call is nothing new, of course, with talk of the concept going way back to the 1964 World's Fair and the AT&T Videophone. And yet the fact remains that through the next five years, Internet based video conferencing is going to become ever more practical and likely a tool that

you will use while on the road. Why? Because there are several trends coming together – high-speed hotel room Internet access, wireless Internet, and increasingly sophisticated use of technology at home.

Internet based videoconferencing already exists, and some people are already taking advantage of it. One of my summer projects has been to get my own system in place. I anticipate that this fall, I'll be able to have live interactive voice-and-video conferences with my two young sons, from wherever I happen to be. They'll chat with me from a computer that is located in my kitchen, which features a tiny \$49 Web cam, and I'll connect from a high speed hotel room through my Webcam equipped laptop.

WIRELESS INTERNET

Many of the innovations that will impact the sales and marketing professional well into the future will come about as a result of the ongoing development of the wireless Internet. Even though we are in the midst of a tech slowdown, there are still billions of dollars pouring into the creation of a sophisticated infrastructure that will let us literally pull the Internet out of the sky.

Anyone who uses a Blackberry pager today understands that the wireless future is already here. Yet that is but a taste of what is to come – the significant development will be a continual upgrading of wireless Internet access speeds, because what we have today is relatively slow.

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Heck, I started out online in 1982 with a 300-baud modem — today, I have a home cable modem that gets me a connection that is literally, a million times faster. The same type of speed improvement will also come to the wireless Internet — and that will, for example, impact how we might use video-conferencing. I have no doubt that five years from now, I'll be able to go out by the hotel pool with my laptop, and be instantly linking into the Internet via a wireless connection at a rate of speed that is fast enough to support HDTV quality video transmission. Or maybe let me watch the sales training video I was supposed to observe yesterday, while I sip my beer in the sun. The implications of the wireless

Internet are perhaps stunning. Imagine walking into a client, flipping the lid on your laptop, and patching yourself and your client into a video conference with the project team at the home office. No wires, no fuss, no muss. Far fetched? I don't think so.

THE IP-CHIP

Mix into this the emergence of the ultimately wired planet. Perhaps one of the most fascinating developments that will come to affect our personal and working lives into the future involves what I have come to dub the IP-chip — or "Internet protocol chip." Its arrival will herald perhaps the biggest technological revolution to have ever occurred.

The IP-chip concept itself isn't that complicated, since what is simply happening is that through the next five, ten or twenty years, many of the devices that surround us in our daily lives will become linked to the Internet. This will come about because the microchips that are found inside them will be able to talk to the Internet.

Now, most of us appreciate that we are already surrounded by microchips. Indeed, it is estimated that there are some 600 billion of them in existence today. We can't avoid them if we try — Intel suggests that by the time we are eating lunch, most of us have interacted with some 130 different microchips. They're everywhere — these little wonders of silicon logic are found in our cars, cell phones, elevators, in factory equipment, air conditioners, microwaves and even birthday cards. And most of them are lonely.

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TECHNOLOGY

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The thing is, any particular microchip in any particular device can't talk to any other microchip. It's a brutally isolated existence — if you think about it, maybe it is sad that the little microchip that controls your microwave oven can't link to any other microchip. They've been condemned to a life sentence of silence.

Well, that is set to change with the next generation of microchips. From the dawn of the Internet revolution, semiconductor (chip) engineers in Silicon Valley have realized that the day would come when each new microchip would have built into it the capability to link to other microchips and other computers via the Internet.

Do that and the capability of every computer chip, and by extension, every device on the planet begins to change, in dramatic fashion. The fact is, if you link my microwave to the Internet, my microwave will be able to do some new, and perhaps wonderful but strange things. Is the future here today? Well, yes — Intel and other semiconductor companies are already actively developing IP-chips today. And it is IP-chip functionality that will permit a health club's stationary bike to talk to your laptop. Or which will allow a piece of factory equipment to query a customer database to determine how much to produce in the next production run. And the client will sit there and monitor their product order in your factory through an online videoconferencing screen, using

a tiny Webcam at the end of the assembly line. Silly? Perhaps.

The media likes to poke fun at this stuff by painting the picture that we are heading into some type of weird Jetsons' type of world. But the fact is, the IP-chip is already here, as is the wireless Internet and countless other technologies. And to figure out where they are going to take us, you merely need to look around. 



Jim Carroll has been helping people cope with a world of technological change for almost 20 years as a keynote speaker, award-winning columnist and author. He is the author of "Surviving the Information Age" and co-author of "Selling Online" and "Light Bulbs to Yattabits."

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